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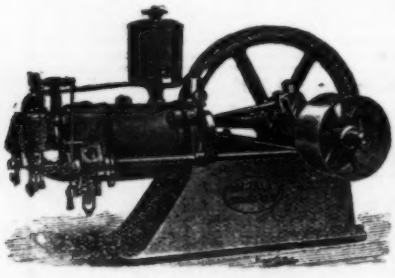

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THE thirteenth ordinary general meeting of shareholders in the above company was held on Monday last, at Winchester House, E.C., under the presidency of Mr. William Nelson.

The Chairman expressed the regret of the board at having to present such an unfavourable report. The state of affairs had been brought about by a combination of circumstances over which the board had no control. In South America prices went up owing to depleted supplies, principally caused by disease and the continuous rains, which prevented sheep from being moved about the country. This was aggravated by an epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease. Thus happened a concurrence of unfortunate circumstances which it might reasonably be hoped would not again take place. At one time it appeared that not only would the handsome profit earned during the first part of the year be swallowed up, but that a large debit balance would have to appear in the accounts. Fortunately, that had been obviated. The board had written off liberally, and had taken the opportunity of putting an item of £11,900 to revenue which they could have brought into capital account. He regretted that he could not speak favourably with regard to the present trading of the company. They were still losing money, otherwise the directors would have felt it their duty to have at least paid the dividend on the preference shares. The unfavourable conditions at present prevailing were nothing like so bad as those experienced during the latter half of 1903. There could be no doubt that something would have to be done for the general protection of the meat companies trading from the River Plate; they would have to combine. The farmers of the River Plate were getting far too much money for their produce. He was about to start for the River Plate with a view of effecting an understanding by which the companies might get a fair return for the capital they had invested. He emphatically denied the statement which had been made that the directors had been dealing in the shares. The competition in the Argentine had been still further increased by the advent of a fourth company into the trade there. He then moved the adoption of the report.

Mr. R. Cooper seconded the motion, and pointed out that the Nelson line had released the company from their liability to ship the large quantity of meat arranged for at the time the charter was made. The concessions during the period under review and the two following years would result in a saving of at least £100,000, and Mr. William Nelson and his co-directors of the line deserved the thanks of the shareholders accordingly.

Mr. Charles Eves expressed regret that the meeting had been convened on a Stock Exchange holiday. He pointed out that at the last meeting the chairman spoke in optimistic tones of the position of the business. Nevertheless, the company's shares had fallen during the year from £4 or £5 to a few shillings, and unless a drastic change took place the money which the shareholders had put into the business would be lost. He moved an amendment, to appoint a committee of shareholders to inquire into the affairs of the company and to report thereon.

Mr. Rankin seconded the amendment.

The Chairman, in reply, denied dealing in the shares. The inspection committee would find that his present holding in the company was £30,000 or more. He and his co-directors were not ashamed of what they had done.

Mr. Cooper said that he held 2,000 shares, the same number he held a year ago.

Mr. Lea-Smith urged that the question of the concession in regard to the charter-party required looking into. It was extraordinary that as soon as someone stirred matters up a saving of £100,000 in three years could be effected.

The Chairman expressed the willingness of the board to accept the proposed committee.

Mr. Cooper said that they had nothing to conceal, and they would afford the committee every assistance.

After further discussion a revised amendment was agreed to—receiving but not adopting the report, appointing a committee of three shareholders (with power to increase their number to five) to inquire into the affairs of the company, and adjourning the meeting for a month to enable the committee to make their report.

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